Volume II.
Number 17.

Week of
November 3, 1941

Critics' THEATRE REVIEWS

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†"The Land Is Bright" opened Tuesday, October 28th, at the Music Box Theatre.
†"Let's Face It" opened Wednesday, October 29th, at the Imperial Theatre.
†"High Kickers" opened Friday, October 31st, at the Broadhurst Theatre.

THEATRE REVIEWS IS A COMPLETE GUIDE AND RECORD TO THE NEW YORK SHOWS

Critics' Theatre Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York papers

NEW YORK SUN
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK JOURNAL AND AMERICAN

Place this week's reviews with preceding weekly reviews so as to have always an up to date file of the New York Stage.

Published by

CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS, 122 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y.

Yearly Subscription
$15.00

"High Kickers"

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD-TRIBUNE, *November 1, 1941*

Burlesque Days

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

IT CAN be said of Mr. George Jessel's new show that it is probably the only musical comedy in Broadway history in which the name of La Rochefoucauld is mentioned. In fact, this "High Kickers" is one of the most cultured entertainments imaginable. In their stride, Mr. Jessel and Miss Sophie Tucker toss off blithe references to the literary elite from Aristophanes to George Jean Nathan, with passing mention of Henley, Wilde, Browning, Swinburne, Shelley, Shakespeare, Disraeli, Diogenes and Clifton Fadiman. Between lessons in beautiful letters, the new work gets down to more mundane matters by providing us with a half-rowdy, half-sentimental anthology of burlesque. Because Mr. Jessel is a funny fellow and has a wonderful taste in show girls, "High Kickers' has moments of considerable interest, but as an admirer of both Jessel and the comics of burlesque, I hate to tell you that the show isn't much.

• • •

Being a Broadway wit of resource and distinction, Mr. Jessel is at his best—and so is his show—when he is chatting amiably and intimately with his audience and sharing with it his culture and his lusty humor. He has two monologues, one in his own person and the other as a nearsighted lecturer, that are a great comfort to all of us, and give promise of good things to come. Since, in addition, the girls are exceptionally good-looking and many of the gags resurrected from burlesque are monumentally funny, "High Kickers" seems to have a pretty good headstart toward success. The misfortune of the evening is that the comedy, which is about as rough as anything to be found in town, usually hasn't much more than roughness to distinguish it. My guess is that the show goes in a little bit too much for its particular version of a plot and doesn't shoot the works in its collection of historic music hall humor.

• • •

Prominent in the cast is the afore-mentioned Miss Tucker, who can still shout down a song and an audience with lustiness and abandon. In "High Kickers" Miss Tucker is playing a hearty actress called Sophie Tucker, who is guide, philosopher, friend and star to the king of burlesque, George Krause jr. (Mr. Jessel, obviously). In what is presumably a big, climactic episode she takes the place of the ingenue in the strip-tease number, and if you think it would be inordinately comic to see Miss Tucker do a strip-tease you should find the new show exactly what you have been waiting for. Personally, I prefer the co-star when she is striving gamely to rhyme "Cape Hatteras" with "mattress." Since the score that those veterans, Bert Kalmar and Harry Ruby, have devised is no great triumph, it strikes me that Miss Tucker is a trifle handicapped, although it is only fair for me to confess that I am not one of her more ardent admirers.

• • •

Among those present in support of the stars are those oldtime vaudevillians, Chick York and Rose King, as the Mayor of Chambersville and his wife; Chaz Chase, who eats matches, shirt fronts, flowers and harmonicas; Jack Mann as an author named S. Kaufman Hart, Miss Lois January as the ingenue, and Miss Betty Bruce, who is a tap dancer of considerable skill. Of these it is Miss Bruce who has the best of the evening. The show girls, as I seem to have suggested already, are something to see, and a song called "Time to Sing" has its points. Since "High Kickers" is frankly the account of a burlesque show in action, there is little reason why any one should expect it to be a squeamish sort of affair. In truth, I haven't the slightest objection to the rowdiness of its humor. The only trouble is that the ribald jokes do not come fast and furiously enough. Anyway, Mr. Jessel continues to be a likable and funny fellow, with an excellent eye.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, *November 1, 1941*

Jessel's Musical Opens

Sophie Tucker Chants with Usual Vigor

By JOHN MASON BROWN

GEORGE JESSEL, fortunately without Momma on the telephone, wandered in and out of High Kickers last night with Sophie Tucker, that last of the red-hot mommas. As regards their wandering, Mr. Jessel and Miss Tucker were luckier than most of us. For High Kickers is not much of a show.

Supposedly a saga of how the son of an old-time burlesque comic carries on his father's business in streamlined terms and marries off a strip-tease artist to a small-town mayor's son, this new arrival is something that seems thrown together like bad eggs and good when they are unsuccessfully scrambled. Here, as in that other scrambling, the good eggs do not win out.

• • •

Jessel Amiable

Mr. Jessel was amiable enough. Unburdened by sentimentality, he was better company than he has been for some time. As a refugee giving a slide lecture he was immensely droll. And he plunged into the Weber and Fields jokes of the prologue and his own subsequent patter with both vigor and assurance. He was full of culture, too. Indeed, hardly a moment passed when he was not referring to Shakespeare, Demosthenes, Oscar Wilde, Swinburne, La Rochefoucauld or Greek sculpture. What is more, he did not bear his learning lightly.

It was impossible not to understand what the erudite Mr. Jessel meant when he referred to Miss Tucker as Whistler's mother with a stonger rocking chair. It was no less impossible not to bag his meaning when he said that Miss Tucker's doing a strip-tease would have to be set down on the program as a double feature.

The Usual Vigor

Miss Tucker is a lady who does not go on a Hay diet except when she sings. Her chanting of I Got Something finds her once again talking back to the horns. It is sung with her accustomed vigor. Even so, I must admit it left me as unsympathetic as a Tennessee marriage. To tell the bitter truth, Miss Tucker appeared strangely subdued. That wonderful energy of hers, that resilient toughness, was somehow misplaced. Most of her songs she talked just the way actors talk poetical speeches by Maxwell Anderson.

When Mr. Jessel and Miss Tucker were not around, Chaz Chase amused himself by eating cigars and matches; Jack Mann attempted ineffectually to vie with Niagara; Rose King did a poor Beatrice Lillie; Betty Bruce tapped industriously and Lois January humned warm numbers that seemed nearer to the Kelvinator than to the Equator, while things in general slumped.

All of it was pretty corny, to be frank, and the corny was not so green. A few of us out front found ourselves among the highest kickers.

Reprinted from
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
November 2, 1941

Many Old Jokes In One New Show

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

HIGH KICKERS is billed as a musical comedy but it may clarify matters to add that the plot has to do with a road-company burlesque show and that the cast is larded with old vaudeville characters and topped off with Sophie Tucker. All this adds up to a kind of entertainment which may lack a name but has an unmistakable bouquet. A strong whiff of the stockyards—or maybe just of the good old days—blows through it.

The oldest gags in the profession, which are naturally the dirtiest, are trotted out in all their pristine impurity.

Chaz Chase, of the old vaudeville circuit, swallows flowers, harmonicas and lighted cigars; Chick York and Rose King, of the same old cicuit, carry on in a box. And George Jessel is generously active, and sometimes rewarding with imitations, spiels before the curtain, and straight-part gagging.

To sum up, you haven't seen such a ham show in years. Some of it was good ham, at which you laughed whether you wanted to or not; but most of it was bad. There was more vulgarity than there was humor to redeem it. The whole thing should have been rattled off instead of ladled out.

That was partly because *High Kickers*, from time to time, did make some attempt to be a musical comedy. On that score, it introduced some good-looking girls and bad-sounding tunes, some attractive costumes and uninspired dancing.

But what future the show had lay in its grosser and cornier elements, and they hark back, on too dead a note, to the past.

"High Kickers"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, *November 1, 1941*

Sophie Tucker and George Jessel On Broadway in "High Kickers"

By WILELLA WALDORF

GEORGE JESSEL still has a literary allusion for every occasion, a head full of theatrical memories, a heart bursting with sentiment, and a kitbag full of old vaudeville and burlesque jokes. Sophie Tucker is still the Last of the Red Hot Mammas, singin' about "her man," philosophizing about love, telling innocent chorus girls the facts of life. In Mr. Jessel's new show, "High Kickers," revealed last night at the Broadhurst Theatre, she also does a strip tease that is interrupted by the Mayor's wife from a stage box. The Mayor's wife (the town is Chambersville) is Rose King. The Mayor is Chick York. Otherwise York and King. Remember?

Mr. Jessel (and his financial backers) have spent a good deal of money on "High Kickers" judging from the elaborate effects not only designed, according to the program, but also "created and supervised" by Nat Karson. The show itself, however, is a blatantly tasteless affair, overflowing with warm-hearted vulgarity, banishing stage tears with stage laughter, harking back to "the good old days" with a sob in the voice, dragging in anything for a guffaw, dragging out hackneyed numbers far into the night.

The evening began with a scene from George M. Krause Sr.'s "High Kickers of 1910," when Mr. Krause, the comedian-manager, collapsed on the stage and, carried to his dressing room, made a dying speech to his youthful son to the effect that the show must go on. Under George M. Krause Jr. (both Krauses are played by Jessel), the show does go on, year after year, coming up to date with "High Kickers of 1941." Since Sophie Tucker, a sylph from the original 1910 days, was willed to Georgie by his dad, she is still going strong in 1941 and pining to do a strip tease. Georgie says no, for obvious reasons, but she finally has her way—until the Mayor's wife intervenes and the whole troupe is carted off to court, where Mr. Krause-Jessel has a chance to imitate Eddie Cantor in "The Follies of 1918" and George M. Cohan singing "Give My Regards to Broadway."

While Mr. Jessel is changing his clothes, and Miss Tucker is catching her breath after a particularly violent bout with some belligerently sexy songs (one begins with a tableau featuring the Statue of Liberty surrounded by show girls with tanks and battleships on their heads), there is filling-in by Betty Bruce, a dancer of no mean talent; Chaz Chase, the fellow who eats lighted cigars, cigarettes, matches, paper or what have you; Jack Mann, a burlesque comedian who spits water into hats; a troupe of adagio dancers, and the above-mentioned York and King, who wander uncertainly in the background when not sitting in their stage box. There is also some limp love interest, anemically supplied by Lois January and Lee Sullivan, and a slapstick interlude in which Miss Tucker hits Mr. York with a pie.

Just as you are beginning to pinch yourself to see if by any chance you have fallen asleep and are in the throes of a nightmare brought on by a visit to "Hellzapoppin," Mr. Jessel comes out disguised as a near-sighted Czechoslovakian lecturer and proceeds to give a talk with slides that are not what they should have been.

Since the performance began thirty-five minutes after the advertised time, it was still going grimly forward as this reviewer tore out to a typewriter. Miss Tucker, still far from Tuckered out, was showing unmistakable signs of going into "Some of These Days," while a finale billed as "Bits of What You've Heard" loomed ahead. Precisely what went on in the early morning hours we are in no position to know, but will make a small bet that Mr. Jessel sang "My Mother's Eyes" and "Toss Another Log on the Fire," winding up around breakfast time with a long telephone conversation with "Mommer."

"High Kickers" is a show designed for abject admirers of the sentimental comedy of Mr. Jessel and the strenuous trumpeting of Miss Tucker. This reporter finds it possible to take both only in small doses, with deep-breathing exercises in between.

'HIGH KICKERS.'

A musical comedy in two acts; book by George Jessel, Bert Kalmar and Harry Ruby, from a suggestion by Sid Silvers; music and lyrics by Mr. Kalmar and Mr. Ruby; book directed by Edward Sobol; dances by Carl Randall; production designed and supervised by Nat Karson; presented at the Broadhurst Theater on October 31, 1941, by Alfred Bloomingdale.

The cast:

The Candy Spieler	Bill Vine
High Kickers Chorus	Themselves
Two American Showgirls	Joyce Matthews, Rose Teed
Schultz	Joe Marks
Geo. M. Krause Sr. (Kelly)	Geo. Jessel
Sophia	Robin Marlow
The Doctor	Rollin Bauer
George M. Krause Jr.	Dick Monahan
The Stylish Four	Shaw, Bay, Young, Griffin
Mamie	Betty Bruce
Sophie Tucker	Herself
Geo. M. Krause Jr.	George Jessel
S. Kaufman Hart	Jack Mann
Kitty McKay	Lois January
Jimmy Wilberforce	Lee Sullivan
Frank Whipple	Franklyn Fox
Mayor John Wilberforce	Chick York
Hortense Wilberforce	Rose King
Chief of Police	Jack Howard
Betty	Betty Bruce
Stuart Morgan Dancers	Themselves
Betty Jane	Betty Jane Smith
The Pianist	Ted Shapiro
A Stage Hand	Chaz Chase

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, *November 1, 1941*

Jessel's "High Kickers" Rough Revival of Old Burlesque Days

"High Kickers," a musical comedy by George Jessel, Bert Kalmar and Harry Ruby; music and lyrics by Kalmar and Ruby. Produced by Alfred Bloomingdale at the Broadhurst Theatre, New York, Oct. 31, 1941.

★ ★+

By BURNS MANTLE

ADMIRERS of those robust old-timers of vaudeville and burlesque, George Jessel and Sophie Tucker, will find their favorites entertaining violently at the Broadhurst in a burlesque cavalcade called "High Kickers," which started last night.

In it Mr. Jessel, who has been away from the Broadway theatre for a long time, is playing a young manager who inherits a burlesque wheel show from his father and carries on in the family tradition with Miss Tucker as a sort of friendly guardian.

Half of it is rehearsal, half show. There are old jokes and new jokes, most of them foggy with physical allusions, as might be expected of burlesque.

There are old legs and new legs, a lively chorus of youngsters supplying the new, Miss Tucker boldly sacrificing her pride to reveal the old.

Old and New

There are old specialties and new specialties. Mr. Jessel contributing a glimpse of a veteran Irish comedian, an aging comedy lecturer and an old lover singing a new song.

Miss Tucker resurrects her red hot mamma, singing lustily of her satisfaction in the possession of a man, and advising the younger girls of the more practical methods of learning about love.

The somewhat incredible Chaz Chase is returned to resume eating cigars, cigarets, menus, shirts, plants and a small palm tree. The three strong gentlemen who toss a small lady about with supreme abandon are also returned to startle and amaze the audience.

In the newer group you will find Lois January, an attractive young person who sings well and strips with becoming confidence, and Betty Bruce, who can dance you such a succession of taps that she might be a regiment marching or a steam engine accumulating speed.

Rose King is there, and her loyal consort, Chick York. They, you might say, furnish the conflict. Mr. York is the mayor of a town who orders his police chief to raid Mr. Jessel's show, and Miss King is the wife who turns out to be an old burlesque gal herself and helps to free the show folk.

Generous Producer

Mr. Alfred Bloomingdale is the producer, and he has not been niggardly. The costumes he bought, while scanty, are all silk and sufficiently wide to cover what has to be covered.

The scenery, too, is nicely suited to the needs of the show and there is a sizable orchestra. Carl Randall staged the dances, which are lively, and also in the burlesque tradition. Edward Sobol is credited with directing the book, and probably did when Mr. Jessel was not around.

Outside Miss Tucker's ditties a love song called "You're on My Mind" was most popular.

Again I say, this is entertainment for the admirers of Mr. Jessel and Miss Tucker. They give their all, which is considerable, and anyway you shake the show it is Jessel and Tucker that turn up in the important spots.

Of course you cannot buy class, or even a good imitation of class, with money. Mr. Bloomingdale apparently realized that, and decided not to make the effort.

Last night's first audience was large and vociferous.

"High Kickers"

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, *November 1, 1941*

George Jessel and Sophie Tucker in a Musical Comedy About Show Business, 'High Kickers'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

SINCE George Jessel's "High Kickers" takes a sentimental view of old-fashioned show business, we may as well use an old-fashioned word to describe it—"mélange." It is a musical mélange with Sophie Tucker shouting some grimey lyrics, and it was acted with considerable aplomb at the Broadhurst last evening. Snapping up a suggestion from Sid Silvers, a triumvirate of Broadway littérateurs, Jessel, Kalmar and Ruby, have written a book about a burlesque show that is pinched in Chambersville for letting Sophie Tucker perform an extensively costumed strip-tease.

• • •

Out of respect for the literary tone of the book, it must be reviewed in particularly cultured English. For Mr. Jessel refers familiarly to quite a number of the masters while he is skipping through the plot and trying to fix the police. This department was able to scribble in its program the following authors he mentions—Henley, Shelley, Swinburne, Aristophanes, Wilde and La Rochefoucauld, to say nothing of fleeting references to Diogenes, Lady Godiva and Greek statuary in general. In view of the barbarous tone of the humor in the songs and dialogue, Mr. Jessel's quotations from the masters in his philosophical comments give "High Kickers" a remarkably broad range. The jokes are broad. So is Sophie Tucker.

• • •

Although "High Kickers' is probably designed to recapture the glow of show business in the good old days, it is likely to convince a number of people that show business is infinitely keener today. When Nat Karson is not impeded by the book, he can design stunning costumes in white, gold and varied pastel shades, and cycloramas bathed in luscious colors. That is modern theatre, and it is good. The chorus girls, whose notion of the old days is the early twenties, are radiantly lovely, and Carl Randall has taken appropriate pains with their dancing. And Betty Bruce, who hasn't much to reminisce about yet, does some amazingly skilful and beautiful dancing in a modern idiom, and sings "Cigarettes" in better taste than the lyric writer intended. Lois January of the younger set is also a winner.

• • •

Miss Tucker is a singer in the grand manner. No matter what her material may be, she uses it with humor, deliberation and authority. The material this time is all in the key of the single entendre, written in a style that went out with mah-jong, we hope. It is burlesque all right, but is it entertainment? As for Mr. Jessel, he contributes one loudly comic sketch as a broken-down lecturer, imitates Eddie Cantor convincingly, dies with considerable gasping sentiment in the prologue and hides an aching heart in the romantic climax of the book. Apart from that he walks briskly across the stage in a series of well-fitted suits, carrying a new hat in his hand.

Chick York and Rose King contribute a bit of funny slapstick in a box. After taking a good swig, Jack Mann can spout a stream of water into a hat ten feet away. That's good. After all these years of eating lighted matches and shirt fronts, you would think Chaz Chase would have stomach trouble. If he had gastritis he would have blown up long ago. He consumes a harmonica this time just to prove that he is not finicky.

Most of the good things that pop up here and there in "High Kickers" are not of the past but strictly of today. Mr. Jessel's musical mélange is malodorous and mediocre.

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, *November 1, 1941*

'High Kickers,' With Sophie Tucker, Opens at the Broadhurst Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

SOPHIE TUCKER and George Jessel, to say nothing of lesser fry, have quite a struggle with the plot in "High Kickers," a musical comedy which opened last evening at the Broadhurst. Every now and then somebody gets an arm out of the coils, and once Miss Tucker struggles free to sing a fine, rude song with her own unrivaled lustiness. But such plot-breaks are lamentably rare, because here are authors with a story to tell, so help them.

Mr. Jessel, Bert Kalmar and Harry Ruby have conspired to weave an entanglement, basing it on a "suggeston" by Sid Silvers. (I have a gloomy suspicion that Mr. Silvers's suggestion ran to hundreds of pages, like a historical novel.) The story is about a man who inherits a burlesque show, and Sophie Tucker, from his father, and runs it for years and years until finally his strip-tease artist falls in love with the son of a mayor in Chambersville, U. S. A. Then she doesn't want to strip any more, so Sophie strips and everybody gets arrested and all the girls dance in a court room and the mayor gets hit by a pie and——. But listen, this could go on all day.

It went on most of last night. There was sentiment and mild bawdry, and plays within plays, until even Miss Tucker was quite, quite quenched. During the first long act the plot licked everybody, and in the brighter second only Miss Tucker really got out from under. Then she sang "I Got Something" and there were ten minutes, including encores, that nobody could want improved upon. In that act, too, Mr. Jessel found time from his responsibilities to entertain, doing a few jaunty impersonations.

Better music, and particularly better lyrics, than have been composed by Mr. Kalmar and Mr. Ruby would have helped. More ingenious dances, and generally better use of the pretty girls in the chorus, might have distracted attention from the glumly plodding tale. Gay things for Mr. Jessel and Miss Tucker to do, singly and together, would have made an engaging show out of "High Kickers," since both are engaging people. Miss Betty Bruce dances beautifully when she gets a chance, Miss Lois January could probably do a lot with more than she has and it is pleasantly horrifying to watch Chaz Chase eat cigars, cigarettes and old flowers, and finally chase a chorus girl with a salt-shaker in his hand.

There are pleasures in "High Kickers," of which the largest—in all respects—is Miss Tucker. But what with the plot and everything you are left hardly strong enough to enjoy them.

Reprinted from NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN, *November 1, 1941*

'High Kickers' Stars Tucker and Jessel

New Musical Farce Presented at the Broadhurst

By JOHN ANDERSON

LIKE the Rocky Mountains, Miss Sophie Tucker is one of the more popular hillocks on the U. S. landscape, and since she is both mobile and vocal, she is able to go places and do things that the average Alp finds impossible. She can sing sexy songs which would abash a more modest foothill, and when she puts herself into motion we behold a jovial upheaval in geodetics.

But even Miss Tucker in the gigantic gyrations of a strip-tease, aquiver with a mass of roughishly rolling disclosures, is hardly able to allevitae the routine nature of Georgie Jessel's new musical, "High Kickers,' which Alfred Bloomingdale presented last night at the Broadhurst. She works valiantly at it, and Mr. Jessel has a couple of very funny sketches for himself, but somehow the whole thing has the air of an assembly job, knocked together without much finish, or slick Broadway showmanship.

Lecture Sketch

The show drags its plot through the story of a youngster who inherited his father's show business, and found himself not only with a career but a guardian, in the ample person of Miss Tucker. The company gets into trouble when Miss Tucker does a striptease in a small town, goes through a court scene which ought to have been hilarious but isn't, and winds up happily when Sophie discovers that Mrs. Mayor is an old Police Gazetteer.

Mr. Jessel's funniest sketch is a lecture number, with slides, an overwhelming moustache, and a peculiar accent. Miss Tucker's chief number is an unblushing song called "I Got Something," a rather lurid item, which she delivers as if it were not a mate-call so much as several tons of coal if not soot.

The chorus is handsome and Betty Bruce dances fastidiously in spite of the somewhat sullied surroundings, and there are a few pleasant songs, out of the tunebooks of Kalmar and Ruby, notably "You're on My Mind" and "Cigarettes." Jack Mann is highly entertaining as a stooge playwright named S. Kaufman Hart, and the old reliable team of York and King has a few small errands in the plot.

Though it contains, in the exuberant poundage of Sophie Tucker one of our theatre's greatest shakers, the show is, I fear, no great shakes.

"Let's Face It!"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, *October 30, 1941*

'Let's Face It!' With Danny Kaye, Is Offered at the Imperial

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

SINCE "Let's Face It!" came to the Imperial Theater last evening, only happy yelps may be expected from this department today. "Let's Face It!" blossoms like a sunflower in the season's twilight, and would be pretty radiant in any season. It has Cole Porter songs and Danny Kaye and, so far as this reviewer can determine at a good, long look, practically everything else. Even the book is all right.

Herbert and Dorothy Fields have run up a story about three not-so-young ladies who go in quest of a trio of fledgling soldiers. Although Mr. Porter's lyric comments are wicked, the search is reasonably innocent, being intended only as revenge on philandering husbands. And the soldiers, one of whom is Mr. Kaye, are in love with three pretty girls. As we say of such matters, complications ensue.

One of them finds Mr. Kaye momentarily portraying Dracula, setting out to sea in a canoe with Miss Eve Arden, a lovely lady who is sadly libeled by the authors. If you can imagine Mr. Kaye as Dracula you're doing fine, but probably not as fine as Mr. Kaye is doing himself. Miss Arden is more than a match for him as they come boating back, but the deftly caustic Miss Arden is a match for almost anybody.

Mr. Kaye and his associates are permitted, in another of the complications, to join a group of statues, and if you can imagine that—imagine the tonic, idiotic hilarity of it—you are probably laughing yourself into convulsions at this very moment. Interludes in the story permit Mr. Kaye to sing several patter songs, written for his special benefit by Sylvia Fine and Max Liebman, and one of them is all double talk and gestures and too funny to be tarnished by description. Very comical lad, this Mr. Kaye.

Nor is his the only comedy. Breaking a book writer's tradition of long standing, the Fieldses have found funny things of their own to write. The dialogue may not always crackle, but often enough it explodes and there is hardly a cliche in it. Mr. Porter, maintaining a tradition of his own, picks up the wit in his lyrics, and writes some fine music to go with the words. "Everything I Love" is one of the most melodious; "Farming" one of the funniest. But those who do not fancy these can take their pick of the crop.

Edith Meiser and Vivian Vance are associated with Miss Arden in plot and comedy; Mary Jane Walsh sings heartily; Nanette Fabray sparkles and Mary Parker and Billy Daniel spin like pretty tops. The dancing is polished and inventive and the girls are as lovely as their clothes. No major flies anywhere in the ointment, that I can see. Very superior balm, this "Let's Face It!" and sure to be good for what ails you.

'LET'S FACE IT!'

Musical comedy in two acts; book by Herbert and Dorothy Fields; songs by Cole Porter; staged by Edgar MacGregor; dances and ensembles by Charles Walters; settings by Harry Horner; costumes by John Harkrider; presented at the Imperial Theater on October 29, 1941, by Vinton Freedley. The cast:

Polly Lee ..... Janice Joyce
Madge Hall ..... Marguerite Benton
Helen Mardy ..... Helene Bliss
Dorothy Crowthers ..... Helen Devlin
Anna ..... Kalita Humphreys
Winnie Potter ..... Mary Jane Walsh
Mrs. Fink ..... Lois Bolton
Mrs. Wigglesworth ..... Margie Evans
Another Maid ..... Sally Bond
Maggie Watson ..... Eve Arden
Julian Watson ..... Joseph MacCauley
Nancy Collister ..... Vivian Vance
George Collister ..... James Todd
Cornelia Abigail Pigeon ..... Edith Meiser
Judge Henry Clay Pigeon ..... Fred Irving Lewis
Molly Wincor ..... Marion Harvey
Margaret Howard ..... Beverly Whitney
Ann Todd ..... Jane Ball
Phillip ..... Henry Austin
Jules ..... Toni Caridi
Eddie Hilliard ..... Jack Williams
Frankie Burns ..... Benny Baker
Muriel McGillicuddy ..... Sunnie O'Dea
Jean Blanchard ..... Nanette Fabray
Lieutenant Wiggins ..... Houston Richards
Jerry Walker ..... Danny Kaye
Gloria Gunther ..... Betty Moran
Sigana Earle ..... Miriam Franklin
Master of Ceremonies ..... William Lilling
Private Walsh ..... Fred Nay

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, *October 30, 1941*

"Let's Face It!" Brings Danny Kaye Back to Town, at the Imperial

By WILELLA WALDORF

VINTON FREEDLEY has brought "Cradle Snatchers" up to date, and served it at the Imperial Theatre with songs, dances, girls and Danny Kaye, under the title "Let's Face It!"

In case you have forgotten "Cradle Snatchers," it was a highly unsubtle farce about three wives whose husbands went off on a fling. To teach the erring ones a lesson, the wives imported three college boys and staged a fling of their own. As we recall it, two of the wives were Mary Boland and Edna May Oliver, and one of the boys was Raymond Guion, now Gene Raymond, the movie actor. Ah, me, how time flits.

Well, to bring "Cradle Snatchers" up to date, you substitute three privates from Camp Roosevelt on Long Island for the three college boys, toss most of what originally passed for a plot out the window, and set everybody singing and stepping like mad.

One of the privates is Danny Kaye, who is a show in himself, but Mr. Freedley is generous. He has enlisted a number of other well-known and talented people for the duration, including Eve Arden, Mary Jane Walsh, Edith Meiser, Vivian Vance, and Benny Baker. It is our private opinion that Miss Arden hasn't enough to do—we're still laughing over her imitation of Gertrude Lawrence in "Two for the Show"—but "Let's Face It!" after all, is strictly Danny Kaye's show, and that turns out to be, on the whole, a very good idea.

Surely everybody knows by this time that Mr. Kaye first emerged into the musical comedy limelight last season when he climbed up during the circus scene in "Lady in the Dark" and sang a jaw-breaking number full of unpronounceable Russian polysyllables, thereby waking up a dozing audience.

Mr. Kaye's handy way with a patter song is recognized in "Let's Face It!" not only by Cole Porter, who has concocted some of his most elaborate lyrical complications for the occasion, but also by Mr. Kaye's wife, Sylvia Fine, who, with Max Liebman, has written two special numbers, "A Fairy Tale" and "Melody in Four F," both of which are good. The latter brought down the house just before the finale last night. It is useless to describe either. Mr. Kaye must be seen and heard to be appreciated.

When he is off-stage, which, fortunately, is not often, Mr. Porter's merry tunes are put over for the most part by Mary Jane Walsh, in her low, husky voice, and Charles Walters has staged some uncommonly pleasant dance routines to keep things moving. The scenery is utilitarian and the costumes may be described as colorful.

In addition to the performers mentioned above, a youthful dance team, Mary Parker and Billy Daniel, presented a couple of lively numbers, one of them called, alarmingly enough, "Cattin' a Persian Rug." Sunnie O'Dea tap-tapped a little, and Nanette Fabray and Jack Williams, graduates of "Meet the People," helped out when they could. Incidentally, a very tall girl who carried around a tray full of glasses of milk in the first scene had one of the funniest faces on the stage, but we never saw much of her after that.

"Let's Face It!" is not the greatest musical comedy ever staged or anything like that, but it's a very welcome addition to the Broadway arena after all the flops we've been having lately, and Danny Kaye, bless him, is a refreshing addition to the corps of singing comedians. His is the sort of entertainment you will want to drop in on more than once—every few weeks, in fact.

We repeat, however, that Eve Arden hasn't enough to do, for she's a comedienne worth reckoning with. And while striking a faintly sour note in closing, we may as well repeat what we overheard on the way out in the crowd, just to indicate that, strange as it may seem, Danny Kaye is not everybody's dish. A gentleman fighting his way toward the doors was growling savagely:

"Insufferably cute! Altogether too much baby talk!"

An old Army man, no doubt.

"Let's Face It!"

Reprinted from NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN, *October 30, 1941*

'Let's Face It' Opens at Imperial Theatre

Musical Show About Draftees Marked by Danny Kaye's Hilarious Fooling

By JOHN ANDERSON

IN the face of "Let's Face It" Vinton Freedley's new musical production at the Imperial last night, let us release all the unshed adjectives that have been held back in a stingy season, let us toss up the verbal banners, slap our grateful sides, already aching with laughter and cry "Hurrah" if not "Bravissimo." Danny Kaye is terrific. Exclamation point. Cole Porter's songs are delightful. Ditto! The production is brilliant. Here is the first thoroughly entertaining new show, with no ifs, ands, or buts attached, since the season creaked open back in September.

This is, I hasten to add, your usual sourpuss speaking, the face and vocabulary bent somewhat out of recognizable shape by all this unaccustomed merriment. In ordinarily good seasons "Let's Face It" would be a headliner. After the prolonged famine of Broadway entertainment it looks deliriously like a masterpiece.

If it doesn't deserve quite all that certainly Danny Kaye does for after his brilliant work last season in "Lady in the Dark" he emerges in the new show as a comic artist of stellar scale, a dynamic funny fellow of dazzling energy and incredible skill. He is smart, daring, with a quick tongue and quicker humor that make him the perfect inhabitant of Mr. Porter's world of sly urbanities.

By building their story around Mr. Kaye as a somewhat undisciplined selectee at Camp Roosevelt, Herbert and Dorothy Fields have hit upon a subject that is topical but not tiresome. When three frustrated Long Island matrons pry into the camp to do a little weekend cradle snatching the plot leaps blithely and easily from army humor to sexy joke, skipping a blush or missing a song-beat.

Odets and Tomatoes

The scheme gives Mr. Porter full latitude for the sophisticated mockery of such songs as "Farming," razzing the new generation of gentlemen farmers ("When Odets grew a tomato he plowed under the Group Theatre") and "Let's Not Talk About Love," a mischievous catalogue poking fun at the big shots and sung hilariously by Mr. Kaye and Eve Arden.

To the captivating Mary Jane Walsh falls the assignment of the evening's chief woocry "Everything I Love," a top-drawer number which she does admirably with Mr. Kaye, and she introduces also "Rub Your Lamp" and "I've Got Some Unfinished Business with You." Nanette Fabray and Jack Williams have an amusing duet "You Irritate Me So" and Mr. Williams not only does some pleasant dancing, but with Benny Baker and Mr. Kaye, he forms the hilarious army trio that loses nearly everything save honor. As the three frustrated matrons Miss Arden, Edith Meiser, and Vivian Vance are immensely amusing.

Mary Parker and Billy Daniel make up a flashingly clever dance team for two full-stage specialties, and the dancing throughout, directed by Charles Walters, is lively and interesting, done by the usual Freedley lallapaloosas or lookeroos.

Harry Horner's numerous settings are gaily spirited in the mood of the show and manage adroitly to include Mr. Kaye's entrance by way of an army truck pushing in the side of a building.

Baffling Item

I have saved for the last, as Mr. Kaye shrewdly does, an item which baffles description and boggles not only the language but the imagination. It was written by Sylvia Fine (Mrs. Kaye) and Max Liebman, especially for Mr. Kaye's acrobatic vocal chords, and it makes his tongue-twister "Tschaikovsky" sound like a slow chant. It is called "Melody in Four F." If it were printed it would be five lines of scrambled type to one word of sensible meaning.

In Mr. Kaye's incredible and crooning narrative, his gestures, his expression, and above all his remarkable inflection of utterly meaningless sound, it is the story of a man being drafted into the army. It is completely ga-ga. It sounds like double-talk translated into Arabic, then doubled and redoubled for a grand slam. It doesn't make sense, but Mr. Kaye makes you know exactly what it means, and it is the tip-top point of a big and beautiful musical that is good fooling and great fun.

Having a wonderful time. Wish you were here.

Critics' THEATRE REVIEWS

Enjoyed when first received—

Valued through the years—

Treasured for future reference—

An Excellent Gift Solution

Critics' THEATRE REVIEWS

"Let's Face It!"

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, *October 30, 1941*

Season Has a Hit at Last As Let's Face It! Arrives

By JOHN MASON BROWN

AT LAST it has happened! Broadway's flag need no longer droop at half-mast. With Let's Face It! the hit for which we have all been waiting has arrived. Vinton Freedley's new musical has reached the Imperial as a production in the very best tradition both of Broadway and of Mr. Freedley. It is a smooth-running, uproarious and delectable affair with almost everything to recommend it.

Do you remember Cradle Snatchers? Well, that merry farce of many seasons back about the three middle-aged women who took revenge on their erring husbands by hiring gigolos for a week end is the evening's point of departure. No more than that. For Herbert and Dorothy Fields are original librettists. They do not borrow the whole arch, merely its keystone. That central situation is all that they have taken, and even it they have reworked and admirably restated in terms both contemporary and appropriate to a musical comedy.

Although the middleaged women may remain ladies who prefer to play with fire rather than to cook, the gigolos are no longer gigolos. They are draftees; young men anxious to make some money on the side. And the scenes —at a diet farm around Camp Roosevelt and up and down Long Island—are now as itinerant as a musical comedy demands.

If Cradle Snatchers was never what Mr. Shaw would have identified as a play for Puritans, neither is Let's Face It! a musical for such innocents as may think the Stork Club is a baby clinic—it is, however, an exuberant and irresistible show which does not hesitate to call a shovel a spade. In its good, rowdy way it is a joy almost from beginning to end.

* * *

First of all, there is Danny Kaye. No! Like wise diners, possessed of a sense of climax, let's save the center of the beefsteak and the heart of the watermelon to the end. But don't forget Mr. Kaye is there.

Cole Porter has followed the book's amusing situations with a diverting score. If his music is not his best (and it never is to tone-deaf critics until, having said so, they find the whole town dancing to it and humming it), it is rippling and pleasant, and rises to such a palpably superior number as Ev'rything I Love. Furthermore, its lyrics are rhymed with the expected Porter virtuosity.

As the erring wives Vivian Vance, Edith Meiser and Eve Arden are highly entertaining. Miss Vance has an agreeable blond insouciance. Miss Meiser is an adept farceur. And Miss Arden is as expert at releasing a farcical line as she is at projecting a song. As Danny Kaye's neglected fiancee Mary Jane Walsh once again demonstrates that as both a singer and a personality she is as forceful as she is attractive.

Then, Mary Parker and Billy Daniel are admirable dancers. Benny Baker, as one of the overtime draftees, shows once more that he is a droll young moon-faced fellow with a genuine talent for comedy. And Jack Williams, as another of these overworked soldiers who bravely face their own defense problems, is a dancer of genuine ability. Nanette Fabray is a young lady as easy to look at as she is to listen to.

* * *

Yes—and finally there is Danny Kaye. He is an amazing fellow, this Danny Kaye, make no mistake about it. If in his introductory moments he seems uncertain, that is only at the outset. Give him a patter song to rattle off, or let him sniff an imaginary lily, and he is one of the outstanding performers of our time. Danny Kaye striking postures so as to blend with the figures on a War memorial; Danny Kaye chanting a fairy tale about tomatoes; Danny Kaye in a boathouse pretending to be Dracula, or Danny Kaye racing with incredible speed and precision through some Modern Major General lyrics are all high points. Indeed, they are the kinds of exceptional feats you would have expected from the amazing young man who dashed through the directory of Russian composers in Lady in the Dark last season.

But, devastatingly funny as he is in all these numbers, Mr. Kaye is downright superb in the astonishing tonsil-rattling song just before the finale, in which, with many noises, few words and wonderful pantomimic clarity, he describes a draftee's induction into the army. His performance of this number, which Sylvia Fine and Max Liebman have here written especially for him, is a brilliant tour-de-force. As a matter of hot fact, the evening as a whole is something that does not make you want to cry "Bravo!" but to shout it.

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, *October 30, 1941*

"Let's Face It," a Show With Rhyme, Rhythm and Danny Kaye

"Let's Face It," musical comedy by Herbert and Dorothy Fields, suggested by the farce, "Cradle Snatchers," by Russell Medcraft and Norma Mitchell. Songs and lyrics by Cole Porter, Sylvia Fine and Max Liebman. Produced by Vinton Freedley at the Imperial Theatre, New York, Oct. 29, 1941.

* * *

By BURNS MANTLE

MR. DANNY KAYE was covering himself with confusion and glory as we left the Imperial theatre last evening. He had been romping enthusiastically through two acts of Cole Porter's "Let's Face It," and both he and his audience were having the time of their recent playgoing lives.

At the point noted Mr. Kaye was singing the second of the songs Mr. Porter and his producer, Vinton Freedley, have permitted Mrs. Kaye (Sylvia Fine) and a collaborator, Max Liebman, to interpolate in the evening's festivities.

It is programmed as "Melody in Four F" and it is one of those rhythmic rigamaroles that Mr. K sings with the amazing gusto of a top-flight Gilbert and Sullivan comedian.

It tells, partly in pantomime, partly in squeals, partly in grunts and largely in action the story of a selectee who found his name in the draft, presented himself to his board with a list of ailments extending from total deafness to flat feet and was passed with a 1A rating, only to pop off so many comrades in maneuevers later that the government was forced to give him a medal.

Others, Too

Well, this incident was a highlight of the "Let's Face It" evening, but it was only one of several. Mr. Freedley has been wise enough to provide his generously and expertly selected cast with a story they can put their backs into, and their grins, not to mention their bumps.

It is that old farce plot with which Mary Boland, Edna May Oliver and Margaret Dale once had great fun when it was called "Cradle Snatchers." The story is of three middle-aged wives who grab themselves three personable young men and romp through the garden with them in an effort to be even with their three cheating husbands. It goes even better with songs than it did with shrieks.

Happily, the songs are mostly those intimate little ditties having to do with the vagaries and weaknesses of sexily minded humans who find themselves off the reservation and of a mind to make a lot of the adventure.

These include "A Lady Needs a Rest," an elaborate husking bee item called "Farming" that has a lot of go; "You Irritate Me So," a semi-serious ballad, "Everything I Love" and a couple of others.

Nice Troupe.

Cavorting with Mr. Kaye, and also with enthusiasm, is Eve Arden, one of the literates of the better comedienne group; Mary Jane Walsh, who knows her songs and the men she sings them to; Nanette Fabray (who used to be a Fabares when she was with "Meet the People," and is still an engaging brunette bundle); a dancing pair, Mary Parker and Billy Daniel who have the elaborate numbers, and another pair of excellent tappers, Sunnie O'Dea and Jack Williams.

It is a gay troupe, well directed by Edgar MacGregor, who always manages to get the most out of a story; and by Charles Walters, who brings a fresh and inventive mind to the staging of the dance numbers.

"Let's Face It" will be needing fresh costumes by next Spring and will probably go back to John Harkrider for them, seeing he has done particularly well with this first set. Harry Horner did the settings, which are pleasing and maneuverable.

Last night's audience was dressy, social and enthusiastic at $6.60 the seat. A huge crowd in the street probably expected to see the Duke and Duchess of Windsor enter or emerge. No dook.

"Let's Face It!"

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, *October 30, 1941*

THE PLAY IN REVIEW

"Let's Face It!"

By BROOKS ATKINSON

LET'S face the facts of "Let's Face It!" which was staged at the Imperial last evening. It is a wonderfully joyous musical show. Taking an old remainder, once known as "Cradle Snatchers," Herbert and Dorothy Fields have run it up into an impudent knockabout book that keeps all the performers congenially at work. Cole Porter has shaken some good tunes and rhymes out of his sophisticated jukebox. And Danny Kaye, who was the white-headed boy in "Lady in the Dark" last season, has twisted his sharp fingers and aquiline profile into some highly original musical mummery. Everything about "Let's Face It!" is bright and brisk and continuously enjoyable.

* * *

After all, it is the people who count. You will not be devastated to learn that the libretto recounts the alarming adventures of three married ladies who decide to freshen their lives by hiring three soldieres to strut with them. It is more to the point that Eve Arden, a lovely and rangy clown with a droll style of fooling, is first lady of the masquerade, and Edith Meiser and Vivian Vance trail along with her. As for Uncle Sam's uniformed forces, Benny Baker, the moon-faced minstrel, and Jack Williams, who was dancing in "Meet the People" last season, meet temptation with antiseptic forbearance. Toss in Mary Jane Walsh, who can sing with exhilarating assurance, Sunnie O'Dea, Nanette Fabray and a number of new shapes and faces, and you have a singing society well suited to merry-making.

* * *

For let's face this eerie fact: the songs are designed for enjoyment. "Jerry, My Soldier Boy" is resounding band music. "You Irritate Me" is "You're the Tops" turned upside down. In "Farming" Mr. Porter shakes a wry stick at the sport of smart people. "Let's Not Talk About Love" restores the patter song to its ancient eminence as a test of memory and wind. Last year Mr. Kaye disclosed an uncanny skill in racing through the names of Russian composers without stumbling over the vowels, and here he is in high fettle again. It is amazing. Since there are other accomplishments in his bag of tricks, Sylvia Fine and Max Liebman have written him a travestied "Fairy Tale" that is compact with hilarity, and a double-talk finale that is uproarious. Mr. Kaye conquered every ermine in the house last evening.

* * *

Although Mr. Kaye is a lean and likable virtuoso (who looks like a startled Julius Caesar, in case you care) he does not swindle the other performers. For Edgar MacGregor, who has contrived the staging, has whipped "Let's Face It!" into a swift and dry-humored comedy that races through the night with no concession to favorites. Tangled as the world may be today, chorus girls still come in attactive designs, looking as though they never worried about anything, and Charles Walters has found a number of ways to keep them in impish motion. Trust Harry Horner to fantasticate milk farms and country estates into gay-colored settings. The Army uniform, which was not invented primarily for the musical stage, must have puzzled John Harkrider, who designed the costumes, but luckily for all of us, women still dress like peacocks in the mating season.

It's a good thing. And so is "Let's Face It!" In fact, a mighty good thing in the vein of high-pressure fooling.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, *October 30, 1941*

Soldiers at Play

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

THE drama season takes on new and comforting liveliness with the arrival of Vinton Freedley's latest musical show. It is not that the score is one of Cole Porter's most sensational, or that the book by Herbert and Dorothy Fields is exactly epoch-making, or that the cast sets any new standards for glamour. What is cheering is that Mr. Porter's music is gay and agreeably characteristic, that the oncoming Danny Kaye is brilliantly funny and has one exceptional comic number, that Miss Eve Arden is both humorous and glowing, and that a pleasant air of high spirits enlivens the proceedings generously. It strikes me that "Let's Face It!" might have been a slightly more satisfying entertainment if Mr. Kaye and Miss Mary Jane Walsh could carry the romantic assignments of the plot as ably as they do its more important comic aspects, but that is being captious. The important thing is that the new show is bright, tuneful and enlivening.

* * *

Many years ago there was a popular stage farce called "Cradle Snatchers," which was all about the misadventures of three ladies of middle years who made love to a trio of young men in the hope of making their husbands jealous. The plot of "Let's Face It!" goes back to that once-celebrated play for what could only by a stretch of the imagination be called its inspiration, but it has gone in for modernity long enough to transform the young men into soldiers at one of the training camps. Since Miss Arden, who plays one of the presumably undesirable matrons from whom both husbands and boys flee, is the most attractive person in the cast, the narrative perhaps loses some of the plausibility it might otherwise have had, just as it suffers slightly from the absence of any great romantic appeal amid the excellent comedy gifts of Mr. Kaye and Miss Walsh. Nevertheless, the plot has the great virtue of not getting in the way, it is embellished with several meritorious scenes of rowdy humor and it is quite serviceable as the framework to which to attach the Porter music.

* * *

One strange thing about the score is that the most striking number has not been contributed by Mr. Porter at all. It is something called "Melody in F," and it is the work of Sylvia Fine and Max Liebman. The narrative of the career of a selectee, it is done in what I can only describe as triple-talk. At least, it seems to go a step beyond mere double-talk, in that it doesn't even pretend to be using words. Mr. Kaye is at his best in it, which is very high praise, indeed. I cannot say that I care greatly for his other special number, "A Fairy Tale," which strikes me as being a bit coy. The rest of the music is Mr. Porter's and his best numbers probably are "Ev'rything I Love," "Farming," "You Irritate Me So" and "Ace in the Hole." Done in the familiar but always welcome Porter manner, the music has tunefulness and gayety and "Ev'rything I Love" would be even finer than it seems if you could be sure that at any moment those irreverent humorists, Mr. Kaye and Miss Walsh, were not going to start sneering at its agreeable sentimentality.

* * *

There can be little doubt that Mr. Kaye has in the last two seasons become one of the important comics of the American stage, and he is in a happy vein in "Let's Face It!" The new show doesn't bother much about any conceivable sentimental moments amid its smart brashness, and the fact that Mr. Kaye is not at his best in the work's one romantic song probably is not of epic importance. Miss Arden, who can be briskly and genuinely comic without ever losing her cool beauty and engaging charm, is a player of great style and quality, and she is a complete delight in a not-altogether appetizing role. Miss Walsh can put over a humorous song admirably, which she proves on several occasions. An attractive and appealing young dancer named Sunnie O'Dea offers the romantic charm that the show could have used in a larger role and two of the soldiers are likably played by Benny Baker and Jack Williams. "Let's Face It!" is a good Broadway musical show.

Reprinted from
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
October 30, 1941

Let's Face It Is Oh, Kaye!

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

I DON'T suppose they need close the schools or line the streets or send up rockets, but this day should not pass without some slight public tribute to the hero of last night's gaieties, Mr. Danny Kaye. For he gave to a good routine musical the lift, the oomph, the special cachet that should enable it to live long and remain a happy memory even longer. All evening, as he indulged in a slew of antics, his personality shone, but at least twice during the evening it dazzled. That was when, with his incomparable talent for fast patter, goopy double-talk, mad motions and startling gestures, he executed two numbers (written by his wife, Sylvia Fine, and Max Liebman) entitled *Fairy Tale* and *Melody in Four F*. One could as easily describe a color to a blind man as explain just what these little divertissements consist of. But I assure you they're really quite nice. Some one else may even insist on calling them superb.

For the rest, *Let's Face It!*, if anything but original or inspired, is pleasant and lively enough. The plot is the old but still serviceable one of *The Cradle Snatchers*, advanced 20 years so that the snatching can take place in an army camp. There are at least as many good gags as bad ones—a commendable ratio in a musical show. There are even some inherently hammy scenes which turn out to be fairly funny. There's some pleasant dancing, though it could be pleasanter, and a good enough chorus, though it could be prettier. There is a Cole Porter score which, though it doesn't by a long shot mean what a Cole Porter score once meant, turns up with some clever lyrics and one or two good tunes—notably *Let's Not Talk About Love*.

But perhaps the next best thing after Kaye are some of the other principals, particularly Eve Arden, whose acid manner is just right, and Mary Jane Walsh, who can really put over a song. Edith Meiser, Vivian Vance and Benny Baker are also helpful, as are the sets and the direction. I'm not so sure about the costumes.

"The Land Is Bright"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, *October 29, 1941*

"The Land Is Bright" Opens Opens at the Music Box Theatre

By WILELLA WALDORF

GEORGE S. KAUFMAN and Edna Ferber are feeling remarkably cheerful about Americans and Americans. In "The Land Is Bright," their new play produced last night at the Music Box, they go to considerable trouble to point out that even a vulgar gang of filthy rich roughnecks like the Lacey Kincaids of Fifth Avenue will not be found wanting when their country calls.

Old Lacey Kincaid, who founded the family fortune back in the rip-roaring 'eighties and 'nineties, was one of the pioneers who tore through Montana with a pickaxe, swept his weaker brethren out of the way and made millions out of railroads, copper and anything else he could lay his hands on by fair means or foul. When the play begins, he and his breezy wife, Ellen—a hash-slinger in the old Montana days—are living in their opulent horror of a New York mansion with two more rooms than the Vanderbilts.

At the behest of the socially ambitious Ellen, old Lacey outbids the other millionaires on the street and plunks down six million dollars to Count Waldemar Czarniko for marrying his lovely daughter Tana (short for Montana). The charming match is no sooner arranged than Grant Kincaid, son of the house, brings home a young woman of questionable antecedents as his bride, and the act ends briskly with some fancy shooting. Those were the days, pardner.

Plenty of Shootin'

Act 2 finds everybody who isn't dead a little older, for it's the speakeasy era of the 'twenties, when debutantes got drunk on hooch and ran around with gangsters just for the thrill of it. Tana, home from Europe for the nonce, is contemplating her fourth marriage to a titled foreigner, and the only thing about the Kincaid mansion changed for the better is its decor. The family, if anything, seems to be growing fouler and fouler. This act, too, ends with a shooting. Never a dull moment in the Kincaid menage.

Act 3, of course, brings us up to the present. Those who have survived the 'twenties are very old indeed. A bewildering growth of third and fourth generation boys and girls has sprouted, and the littlest boy of all finds it embarrassing to go to school because his great-grandfather is pictured in the history books as one of the "robber barons" who stripped America of her natural wealth back in the days when it was all there for the taking.

It is at this point, during the celebration of old Grant Kincaid's seventieth birthday, that the younger Kincaids come through at their country's call. As Wayne Kincaid puts it, it's about time Americans stopped taking and started giving. He's to be a dollar-a-year man in Washington. His women-folk are ready to stand by—even to cook if need be. The debutante who had taken up hooch and gangsters back in the 'twenties has become internationally famous raising bulls in Wyoming. Ta-ta-ta-trrrrra! Enter a fourth generation Kincaid in the uniform of an air-force cadet.

The Actors Grow Older

It's as simple as that. The Kincaids are a thoroughly vulgar tribe. The play is a claptrap melodrama, elegantly produced, and it's all very entertaining, being spiced with amusing lines here and there, and full of action and people. Just watching the actors grow older, and wondering how many children the next generation will bring forth is good, clean fun. Broadway is going to love this show and it should stay around for quite a while.

After all, people will say proudly, America can't be such a decadent country. Look at those Lacey Kincaids—even they came through with colors flying in the National Emergency.

Mr. Kaufman has staged all this in his usual smooth, professional style and an enormous cast has the time of its life dabbling in make-up boxes and acting, occasionally over-acting like mad. Martha Sleeper, Leon Ames and Phyllis Povah have the most to do and they do it with a will. Diana Barrymore plays the dreadful debutante convincingly in the 'twenties but grows old ungracefully. Arnold Moss makes an excellent Count, and so on down a long, long list. Mr. Mielziner's setting is elaborately revolting in the beginning and grows less oppressive as modernity creeps up on it. Irene Sharaff has a merry time with the period costuming.

Almost everybody will enjoy "The Land Is Bright," but don't let anybody tell you it's an awe-inspiring dramatic document, even if it does get its title from a poem by Arthur Hugh Clough once quoted over the radio by no less a personage than Prime Minister Churchill.

'THE LAND IS BRIGHT.'

A play in three acts by George S. Kaufman and Edna Ferber; settings and lighting by Jo Mielziner; costumes by Irene Sharaff; directed by Mr. Kaufman; presented at the Music Box on October 28, 1941, by Max Gordon. The cast:

Blake	Herbert Duffy
Matt Carlock	Jack Hartley
Jesse Andrews	Roderick Maybee
Ollie Pritchard	Grover Burgess
Lacey Kincaid	Ralph Theadore
Tana Kincaid	Martha Sleeper
Deborah Hawks	Ruth Findlay
Ellen Kincaid	Phyllis Povah
Letty Hollister	Flora Campbell
Count Waldemar Czarniko	Arnold Moss
Grant Kincaid	Leon Ames
Flora Delafield	Muriel Hutchison
Dan Frawley	G. Albert Smith
Miss Perk	Edith Russell
Dorset	Walter Beck
Anne Shadd	Louise Larabee
Clare Caron	K. T. Stevens
Linda Kincaid	Diana Barrymore
Wayne Kincaid	Hugh Marlowe
Chauffeur	Norman Stuart
Maid	Elaine Shepard
Jerry Hudson	Robert Shayne
Theodore Kincaid	William Roerick
Joe Tonetti	James La Curto
Greta	Lili Valenty
Bennet	Russell Conway
Timothy Kincaid	Dickie Van Patten
Ellen Hudson	Constance Brigham
Lacey Kincaid	John Draper
Bart Hilliard	Charles McClelland
Count Waldemar Czarniko II	Arnold Moss

Reprinted from NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM," *October 29, 1941*

The Land Is Bright If Slightly Tinny

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

THANKS to a good deal of Kaufman humor, to a skilful production, and to the visual rewards of propelling three generations around a sumptuous Fifth Avenue mansion, *The Land Is Bright* makes for lively theatre. All kinds of things happen to all kinds of people, melodrama takes over where wisecracking leaves off, and for once this season you have no temptation to slump down in your seat. But beyond the plushy interiors and the verbal cracklings and the ringing pistol shots, there is simply nothing at all. Not a thing in the play is real; not a thing is even life-sized. The interpretation is not merely hackneyed and hand-me-down; but even what truth might reside in the triteness is lost in a flood of extravagance and exaggeration.

All this might not be particularly important if *The Land Is Bright* were merely intended as entertainment. But both the theme and the upshot of the play clearly indicate that it is not. The story has to do with the fabulous wealth piled up in the 90s by an utterly ruthless robber baron, and with the selfishness, the corruption and the decadence that characterized his descendants. It is not until the end that the younger members of the family, facing the world of today, rebel against the monstrous Kincaid standards, and pledge themselves to work for a more decent and enlightened world.

Now this is a story that you cannot be cavalier about. It cuts too deep, it spreads too far into American life, morally, socially, economically. It demands precise observation and calls somewhere for whys and wherefores. That doesn't mean that it cannot admit melodrama: people like the Kincaids may very plausibly be shot. That doesn't mean, either, that it can't run at times to broad satire; the scene where the crude robber baron sells off his daughter to a suave European nobleman is both amusing and perfectly in place. But in the end, these people should be probed and explained and their story should have a realistic impact.

Instead the whole thing is handled almost as caricature. Never were buccaneers so buccaneering. Never was the gilded youth of the 1920s more pleasure-loving, thrill-seeking, degenerate. These excesses are pretty clearly Miss Ferber's; her tendency to highlight everything has this time run away with her. Not even she has worked before with quite so broad-stroked a brush, or slapped her color on in such huge and gaudy jobs. The result may not be boring; but it is hopelessly unreal. The serious side of the play has simply been thrown away—even to the end. For not at the end, either, is there any getting down to bedrock. People turn away from a rotten world, but more out of disgust than real understanding, and what they turn to, what they intend to work for, is left pretty vague.

The production gives the play considerable lift. Mr. Kaufman's direction is deft and spirited. Jo Mielziner's sets—particularly that for the parvenu palace of the 90s—are admirable. Nobody's acting stands out above the rest, but in the larger roles Phyllis Povah, Leon Ames, Arnold Moss, Hugh Marlowe, Martha Sleeper and Diana Barrymore are all competent or better.

"The Land Is Bright"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, *October 29, 1941*

"The Land Is Bright" Exposes America of the Raw, Raw Years

"The Land Is Bright," drama by George S. Kaufman and Edna Ferber. Produced by Max Gordon at the Music Box, New York, Oct. 28, 1941.

★ ★ ★—

By BURNS MANTLE

A GOOD many of those who saw the first performance of "The Land Is Bright" at the Music Box last night will be saying this morning that it is a pretty lurid melodrama, when you get right down to it, and that lurid melodrama is nothing for two of America's smartest dramatists to be wasting their talents on.

An they will be right in one sense. "The Land Is Bright" is melodrama, a sort of lithograph drama picturing a little luridly the things that money and greed can do, and have done, to this country, to its pioneer stock and their descendants.

Being a revealing, and mostly uncomplimentary, picture of American manhood and womanhood, I fear it isn't going to please a great many people. The smugs will hate it and the mugs will laugh at much of it.

Dramatist Responsibility

Those who would expose American character in the raw, do so, naturally, at their peril. Especially in the theatre, where audiences still gather in the hope of being told pleasant stories and to be given a chance to revel in noble motives, if not heroic deeds.

What, I assume, Edna Ferber and George Kaufman hoped to do with "The Land Is Bright" was to read this generation a lesson in American history that would not make it proud, but wary, and perhaps a little ashamed.

And to bring it up with a turn as it faces the immediate future when decisions will have to be made as to the things worth fighting for if the oft-quoted but variously understood American way of life is to be preserved.

Old Lacey Kincaid was a rough-hewn, gun-toting, greedy, grafting Montana pioneer who took what he wanted any way he could get it and thus founded the Kincaid dynasty.

He ran a pick-ax into a fortune of $300,000,000, came east and built the boarding house landlady's daughter, who became his wife, a mansion on Fifth Avenue that practically put out the eyes of those who saw it.

He bought a decaying French count for his daughter and was plugged by the first man he had ruined on his way up. That was in the late nineties.

On the Way up

The Kincaids continued on into the early twenties, going steadily from bad to worse. The grandchildren became speakeasy habitues, who mixed with gangsters for a thrill and got themselves involved in a murder and a mess of degeneracy.

The family came into the present but slightly chastened. Then the second world war took the great grandchildren in hand and did something to them. There was a pretty wholesale heart changing session with their elders in the end. The promise at the curtain was that the head of the house was going to Washington to work for a dollar a year or less and the rest of them were going to do what they could for the country at home and maybe make a USO soldiers' and sailors' club house out of the old Fifth Avenue mansion.

There is a good deal of acting going on through the unfolding of this cavalcade. Not much of it impressed me as being very genuine.

The old settlers shouted too much. Their immediate descendants drank and twitched too much. And the progressive section was a little too theatrically on the regenerative side.

But it is frequently effective acting, with make-up to go with it. Martha Sleeper ages enthusiastically. Phyllis Povah improves steadily. Ralph Theadore dies with his boots on realistically. Ruth Findlay suffers traditionally as the forgotten spinster.

Diana Barrymore lets herself go as a pasty waster. K. T. Stevens represents the cleaner generation prettily. Flora Campbell sacrifices herself nobly. And Arnold Moss suffers complete decay as the purchased son of a no-account count.

Jo Mielziner's three-generation set is as heavy and atmospheric as all get out. Last night's audience was a little stunned but friendly and interested.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD-TRIBUNE, *October 29, 1941*

American Chronicle

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

BEING optimists about America, Mr. Kaufman and Miss Ferber see the nation brought back to its best democratic principles by the impact of the war and the New Deal. Up to the point in their play wherein it is time for the editorials, however, their catalogue of the country's sins is a lenghty and lurid one. "The Land Is Bright" is a melodramatic panorama of New York from the '90s to the present, replete with gags, and its chronicle of historic national evils is filled with murder, bootlegging, financial piracy, dubious marital alliances and other evils of five tumultous decades in the history of a family and a land. So filled is the new work with incident and character that very little time can be devoted to distinguished playwriting of any sort, and "The Land Is Bright" must stand or fall as a show rather than a play. As such it decidedly stands.

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"The Land is Bright" sees America as reflected by the rather violent history of the Kincaid family, from the time that old Lacey Kincaid, who had made his millions as one of the financial robber barons of the early West, built his vast mansion in Fifth Avenue in the '90s to the day when the grandson of the founder of the family fortune moved to Washington to serve the government in the present war crisis. Old Lacey was shot to death by a former partner he had robbed. During the '20s the family was caught up in the melodramatic hysteria of the Speakeasy Age, and one of the sons was killed by a bootlegger. By 1941 the Kincaids were beginning to grow liberal in their viewpoint, and, under the stress and strain of the new concern for democracy, they become handsomely patriotic and emerge as symbols of the rebirth of the national spirit. It is all very crowded and episodic and highly colored, but it is almost always theatrically effective.

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It is not at all difficult to pick flaws in the new Ferber-Kaufman play. The episodic character of the narrative, wherein only two of the members of the Kincaid family live for the duration of the three acts, makes for the dramatic confusion almost unavoidable in this sort of stage chronicle. The authors seem so determined on ending each act with a murder that it begins to look as if they could think of no other method for getting their curtain down. The crowded, tumultuous quality of the narrative results in a certain superficiality, a certain stock quality of characterization, a certain suggestion of dramatic clumsiness. The episode of the daughter who got mixed up with a gangster and of the shooting of the girl's brother by the gang leader is pretty incredible in its manipulation, if by no means untrue to the possible facts of that curious age. With all these faults, though, "The Land Is Bright" is so vivid, lively and arresting in its shrewd showmanship that it is almost continuously absorbing.

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The drama has the great advantage of Mr. Kaufman's excellent staging and of a number of effective performances. The best of all the players is Miss Phyllis Povah, whose characterization of the mother of the Kincaids is a moving and beautiful piece of work, which gives her scenes even a suggestion of nobility. Miss Martha Sleeper, who must be an ingenuous girl sold to a lecherous count, a snobbish international divorcee and a chastened old woman, has difficulties with her role and is but intermittently successful. Leon Ames also goes through the three acts and ages credibly, despite an unpersuasive last-act make-up.

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In addition, there are fine performances by Ralph Theadore as old Lacey Kincaid, Miss Flora Campbell as a love-lorn social worker, Arnold Moss as the lecherous count and his broken, war-refugee son, by Miss Muriel Hutchison as a sluttish wife, G. Albert Smith as a vengeful victim of the robber baron, by Miss Diana Barrymore as the daughter who is intangled with the bootlegger, by Robert Shayne as a properly dashing newspaper man, and by the attractive young actress who insists on being described as K. T. Stevens, as an upright daughter of the family. Jo Mielziner's sets are helpful. "The Land Is Bright" is no great contribution to American dramaturgy but it is the first first-rate show of the season.

"The Land Is Bright"

Reprinted from NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN, *October 29, 1941*

'The Land Is Bright' Opens at Music Box

Kaufman-Ferber Play Studies a Family Through Three Generations

By JOHN ANDERSON

THOUGH the authors of "The Royal Family" have done another family portrait in "The Land Is Bright" the mood is not mischievous or the intention comic.

What Mr. Kaufman and Miss Ferber have written in the new play, presented at the Music Box last night, is a study of three generations of Kincaids, or from Robber Baron to New Dealer in three easy lessons, with stopover privileges among the Economic Royalists in the second act.

The authors' intentions are serious, their faces are straight, and while the result is strictly from the corn, I found it steadily interesting. It is a sort of grease paint massage of the new national ego—slick, flashy, superficial, and trite, and yet in spite of all its obvious flaws, it is genuinely engrossing.

Since the authors are working on a family panorama covering fifty years, they hit the high spots gaudily and in terms of the Sunday supplements if not the funny papers. Old man Kincaid is a ruthless Montana plunderer, and we see him first in the 1890's in his New York vulgarity of a 54-room palazzo, with 200 million dollars, his ex-hash slinging wife a social climber, and his pretty daughter bargained off for a shopworn title out of Europe's aristocratic hand-me-downs.

20 Years Later

Twenty odd years later we see his ignorant, vicious, lazily contemptuous descendants wasting what he stole in the tin-horn, top-hat frenzy of the Volstead Renaissance, selfish, idle, and incompetent. The last act, time the present, brings them to their senses. They have all learned a lesson, some bitterly, some willingly, and while old Robber Baron Kincaid's son, aged 70, damns Washington as worse than Moscow, the others have all seen the handwriting on the wall. Even the old boy weakens a little at the end to say that we ought to do something about Hitler, and it's his grandson in khaki who has the play's last line—"We'll fix that."

On a stageful of characters the authors have not done much more than sketch in the people on a broad scale, in the loose strokes of social caricature, and though the result is often cheaply theatrical, there is no denying its effectiveness.

If the details seem tainted with easy hokum there is the underlying feeling of essential truth in what is being said for the Kincaids and their descendants form a recognizable part of American history—even to the snooty Europeanized daughter who creeps back to the safety and strength of her citizenship.

There is no subtlety or even Broadway sophistication in the treatment. It looks a little like an operation on the body politic done with a blunt instrument, but for all that the play does touch a significant subject. Though it is not sharply penetrating it is vivid, and it does gather a curious fascination in its own momentum.

Lavish Production

Max Gordon has given it a lavish production in Jo Mielziner's careful and pictorially interesting tansition of the Fifth avenue mansion from *nouveau riche* Victorian horror to the quieter tone of the present. Under Mr. Kaufman's direction the large cast works to admirable effect, and manages to hide, by the vitality of the performances, some of the more acute trashiness of the writing.

Ralph Theadore suggested perfectly the ignorant and crafty strength, the hollowness and greed of the original Kincaid, and Phyllis Povah seemed excellent as his wife, though somewhat ill at ease in her wheel chair survival as his widow. Martha Sleeper endowed the American countess with a lacquered and brittle effectiveness, and Flora Campbell sketched a person of graciousness and distinction in spite of some of her lines.

Leon Ames, who has an important part throughout, not only ages believably but plays with considerable force, and Diana Barrymore has a passage as a Volstead Voluptuary that she does with suitry effect. Arnold Moss presents a shrewd portrait of the penniless count in the first act, and then for a startlingly horrible portrait of a Nazi victim for a flash at the very end—the hideous apparition that makes old man Kincaid say we ought to do something about Hitler, and no wonder! Hugh Marlowe, Louise Larrabee and Robert Shayne all help in smaller assignments.

It had me listening to every word of it.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, *October 29, 1941*

George S. Kaufman and Edna Ferber Take a Look at the Nation in 'The Land Is Bright'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

AFTER taking a fascinating glance back into American history, George S. Kaufman and Edna Ferber declare themselves for today in "The Land Is Bright," which was brilliantly acted at the Music Box last evening. Some of it is comedy; some of it is melodrama and a little of it is related as a solemn lesson for our times in the last act. Just for the record, this column is most enthusiastic about the theatrical gustiness of Mr. Kaufman's and Miss Ferber's portraits of past time, for the literary style of the contemporary section is stuffy.

* * *

But that is counsel of perfection. And it does not alter the fact that as a whole "The Land Is Bright" is rousing drama done with great skill in the acting. Beginning in the late Nineties it follows the fortunes of an opulent family through the plunder of the McKinley era and the dissipations of the Harding era to the myriad anxieties of today. The three-generation panel of drama is always highly theatrical, with at least a few characters bowing down with age into the last scene. "The Land Is Bright" is no exception to the rule. But since it is being performed in the theatre, it might as well be theatrical; and for good measure it includes the most exciting first act of the season, a mettlesome second act with a little shooting and a final curtain line that is likely to upset your equanimity a good deal.

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When the Kincaids first appear on the stage, they are rolling in obscene wealth which they have just accumulated by sharp dealings, and they are enthusiastically marrying off their daughter to an indigent continental count. In the Twenties what is left of the old generation is mournful or neurotic and the new generation is wallowing in sin. By today most of the Kincaids are beginning to have twinges of conscience. The littlest shaver of the lot refers to his great-grandfather as a "robber baron." And when one of the clan arrives from a concentration camp in Europe and staggers across the stage like a dead man, the Kincaid fortune looks like a very trivial thing, indeed, and no longer worth hanging on to.

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When they are writing a show with an undercurrent of meaning, Mr. Kaufman and Miss Ferber are crackling with skill. The broad characterizations of the first Kincaids, who are dripping with wealth and larded with social ambitions, are vastly entertaining in the first act. Ralph Theadore's swaggering gold-note king from Montana, Phyllis Povah's corn-fed social climber and Arnold Moss's unctuous nabob from Europe make an amusing gallery of rogues; and Mr. Kaufman and Miss Ferber know how to keep their hands full of comic business.

The second act is likewise full of harum-scarum mischiefs. As a speakeasy adventuress, Diana Barrymore is quivering with pasty-faced iniquity, and Hugh Marlowe is a highly-amusing reveler, also. In the part of the Kincaid countess, visiting America, Martha Sleeper flounces around the room like something possessed. Now that we have lived through that cut-liquor inferno we can look back on it with disdainful relish. Mr. Kaufman and Miss Ferber can point their moral without opening their mouths.

* * *

Probably we are all a little self-conscious about the present. In order to point a moral for today the authors have to abandon showmanship and make a few platform speeches. And although the audience applauds the speeches with gratifying sobriety, the tone of "The Land Is Bright" takes a turn for the worse. Fortunately, the Kincaids turn out to be noble according to their youth, and this speaks well for the country. But, alas, they were better company in the theatre when they were swindling the country and drinking rot-gut in the disorderly saloons of the dry era.

* * *

Mr. Kaufman has directed "The Land Is Bright" with prodigious sting and animation. To give the chronicle a proper background, Jo Mielziner has enjoyed modernizing an ornate Fifth Avenue mansion by easy stages in questionable taste. The play is cast to the hilt, and most of the acting is sharply accurate in exact detail. As a lady of conspicuous gentility amid the Kincaid vulgarities, Flora Campbell is giving a beautiful performance. K. T. Stevens is a beguiling blonde in spite of her austere signature, and she plays with a kind of gentle radiance also. As an old Montana trigger man, G. Albert Smith is a good man to have around in the first act. Louise Larabee makes life pleasant whenever she is on view. Leon Ames gives a brisk and bustling performance as a Kincaid heir, and Muriel Hutchison does something alluring to the part of his wife.

Mr. Kaufman and Miss Ferber have done their duty as patriotic Americans. When they have not been doing their duty they have turned highly skilled talents into an exuberant show.